

Transcript of digitally recorded interview with Thomas Fabian
Third session: September 16, 2009
Place: Fabian home, 5412 Hamilton Ave., Cheyenne, Wyoming 82009
Interview and transcription: Mark Junge

Mark: OK, now I'm gonna start it and I tell you what we're up to this morning. Today is the sixteenth of September, 2009. My name is Mark Junge and I'm in the home of Isabel and Tom Fabian ... Fabianovich ... Fabianich ...

Thomas: Fabianic.

Mark: Fabianic.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: And this is the third in a series of three interviews. This is our last, we hope, today ... with Tom. And then afterwards Isabel and I are gonna talk for a little while about her life. And then, I was thinking, if it's OK with you I would like to grab a few pictures of you ...two?

Thomas: Alright.

Mark: And I called up, uh ... look at ... you both have yellow on today.

Isabel: Yeah, but I have cold sores and I'd just rather not.

Mark: OK. That's fine. Why don't I just shoot a picture of Tom?

Thomas: We had our flu shots yesterday and she ...

Mark: Oh, is that the reason you have a cold sore?

Isabel: Well, it made it worse, I think.

Thomas: It's a bad day today. She's got cold sores and I got hornets troubles.

Mark: Well, I called up Mike Smith this morning. He is a really, really fine photographer with the local paper? In fact, Tom, I'm a photographer myself but he's the best I've seen in Wyoming.

Thomas: Yeah?

Mark: For photojournalism ... the best I've ever seen. He's wonderful. He's *National Geographic* quality. He does wonderful work and so I asked him if he wouldn't mind ... "Since I'm getting paid for this", I said, "what if I give you fifty bucks to do this?" And he said, "You don't have to pay me," he said. But I said, "No, I'm gonna pay for this, I'll pay you."

So he has agreed to take a picture of you ... you know, magazine quality, and I'd like to do that.

Isabel: [undecipherable, but she may be trying to give Mark a photograph]

Mark: What do you have here? ... If that's alright with you.

Thomas: I guess it's OK.

Mark: OK, but it wouldn't be today 'cause neither one of you is in good shape

Isabel: Why not Can't you just use something like that?

Mark: Well, no, we wanna get you now.

Isabel: ...[?] ...old.

Mark: No, not old ... mellowed. ... [Thomas and Isabel chuckle lightly] This is a nice picture. This is an Olan Mills picture taken in 1990, nineteen years ago. You were a little bit heavier in that picture.

Thomas: Yeah, I guess so. Was that our ...

Isabel: That was our 45th ...

Thomas: ... one anniversary.

Isabel: And then we have one, 52, so we could use one of those.

Thomas: Well, he's gonna ... he's gonna have our picture taken.

Mark: Well, we won't do that today. I'll show you what we ... I'll kind of give you an idea, Isabel, of what we'd like to do. This is a very nice picture. Where was this taken? Here in Cheyenne? ... OK. Well, today, what I'd like to do, Tom, is wrap it up and talk a little bit about your getting out of the service, your family life, your job because when I look back at this whole history of your life I think to myself, "Well" You know, originally, Linda and Joe wanted me to capture a little bit of your World War II experience. And I'm thinkin', "Well, wait a minute. That was only three years out of the life of a man who's 87 years old. So, I know it's important, but your work life is, to me, a very important thing, too. I mean, it has to be with any man. And so I thought we'd talk about your work, just summarize your job experiences, talk a little bit, in conclusion, about the family. I want to get a few ideas of what you think about certain ... some things and I'll tell you about those later. And then I'd like to interview you, Isabel, and talk a little bit about your life and growin' up in Superior. Is that OK? You know the kind of questions I'm gonna ask. I'm not gonna hit you up with anything too difficult.

Isabel: OK.

Mark: [laughs] Does that sound fine with you guys?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: OK. Alright, well, I think we left off yesterday, Tom, with your discharge. And I don't think we mentioned, or you mentioned, where you were discharged and what rank you had, and whether it was honorable or whatever. So, could you give me some idea?

Thomas: Yes. Fort Douglas, Utah ... Salt Lake City. And I had the rank of First Lieutenant and ...

Isabel: It was honorable.

Thomas: Yeah, it was honorable. Better be honorable. And it was, uh ... they sent us home from overseas and on ... and we landed in San Francisco ... Oakland ... and from there on a train to Salt lake to get a ... that's where I got my discharge ... in Salt Lake on my way home.

Mark: At Camp Douglas.

Thomas: Yeah, Fort Douglas they call it.

Mark: How does a person go from Second Lieutenant to First Lieutenant? Do you have to earn that or is it just a time thing?

Thomas: Aw, it's just a matter of time, yeah.

Mark: OK. But you earned it, nevertheless.

Thomas: Oh, I guess so, yeah.

Mark: Um, did you ever think about makin' the military a career?

Thomas: Yeah, I did but after all that time I just wanted to get home with my wife and my family. And I thought about goin' to work with one of the airline companies ... United Airlines or one of those. At that time pilots were a dime a dozen with them. And then about, I guess, five or six years later they kinda opened up and I thought ... then it was too late . I probably coulda went to work for a airlines about five or six years after I got out, coulda got a commercial license without even takin' a test or anything. They tell me they were handin' 'em out to guys like me ... hadda lotta experience and a B-29 was quite an airplane back in those days. It was better than anything that the airlines had.

Mark: Didn't they have the Constellation.

Thomas: Yeah, they a Can ... but those ... nothing like a 29. Twenty-nine was a lot bigger, faster.

Mark: Really?

Thomas: More power. Yeah.

Mark: Well, when you got out you were only 24 years old.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: So ... and you say four or five years later they ... they were not hiring 29 year-olds? Thirty year-olds?

Thomas: Oh, yeah, they were but there was a bunch of 'em, see, there was a lotta pilots...

Mark: Oh.

Thomas: ... that put in for, that wanted to go to work for the airlines. And all of us were discharged at about the same time and that's what they wanted to do.

Mark: Do you think you would'a liked being a pilot? ... commercial pilot?

Thomas: I don't know. I read ... I heard a lot about them. You had to be pretty ... they watched over ya pretty good. They ruled your life pretty well. You had to take a flight check, a physical, and all that every six months or so and you couldn't go out and raise hell [Mark laughs] and a few things like that [laughs].

Isabel: [says something]

Mark: Huh?

Isabel: He couldn't, anyway, with a family.

Thomas: They were ... they were pretty strict, uh...

Mark: When did you get your discharge? I didn't ask you that. When was that? You remember? What ... it was in '46 wasn't it?

Thomas: Yeah, I think it was in April, '46.

Isabel: Yeah, it was in April.

Mark: So did you guys... did you drive from Salt Lake City back to Cheyenne?

Thomas: No, I think I ... I think I took a bus.

Mark: Didja?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: What was your ... what did you think when you saw Isabel?

Isabel: Rock Springs, he took it, not to Cheyenne.

Mark: To Rock Springs? And that's where you met him?

Thomas: Yeah. And she was stayin' ... she was stayin' with her sister there.

Mark: I'll bet that was a joyous reunion.

Isabel: Yeah, that was a ... for me. I don't know about him. He had a little baby then.
[giggles] It was a shock, probably.

Thomas: Yeah, I walked in the door and Violet said, "Here, here's your son."

Mark: Who said that?

Isabel: My sister, Violet.

Thomas: Her sister.

Mark: So what did you think?

Thomas: I didn't know what to think, to tell ya the truth. It was different, let's put it that way.

Mark: You were a father now.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Yeah

Thomas: I wasn't free to do whatever I wanted to do.

Mark: So, then, you had a ...how soon did you have Joe? ... after Brent?

Isabel: Eighteen months later.

Mark: Eighteen months? Now, somewhere, somebody told me. Sometime, somebody told me that you missed a baseball game because ... or you ... because of Joe's birth? What's the story behind that? [laughs]

Thomas: [laughs] Well, we had a ... we had a game in Rock Springs the day that she delivered Joe. I didn't ... I missed the baseball game. I went and stood in the hospital waitin' for the blessed event.

Isabel: [laughs}

Thomas: But they did alright without me. They still won, so

Mark: Oh, they did, huh?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Did you live in Rock Springs, then, for awhile?

Thomas: No, we lived in Superior.

Isabel: About, uh, we were there two or three until he found a place in Superior. He went to work back in the shop ... where he left.

Thomas: Yeah.

Isabel: Yeah, he found a place there and then we moved to Superior.

Thomas: Government apartments.

Isabel: Yeah, government apartments.

Thomas: They had government apartments in Superior for all the workers that were during the war and we managed to get one of those.

Mark: Hmm. Were they good apartments? Nice apartments?

Thomas: Oh, they were, you know ...

Isabel: They had indoor plumbing.

Thomas: Least they had ... least they had indoor toilets.

Isabel: [laughs]

Mark: Which was a switch.

Isabel: Which was pretty nice 'cause I had gotten used to it with my sister.

Thomas: Yeah, we had hot and cold running water and all that stuff and most of the houses in Superior didn't have any of that. It was ...

Mark: No, I'm kinda wondering what you had to pay for that in those days?

Thomas: I think they were about thirty dollars a month, somethin' like that, weren't they?

Isabel: Um-hm.

Thomas: Yeah. They were nice. They were, you know, nothin' fancy, just comfortable.

Mark: Yeah. Now did ... how did you get your job back? I mean, was that a guarantee when you came back?

Thomas: Oh, yeah, I didn't have any trouble with that. No, I went to the mine office and saw the superintendent, told him I'd like to have my job back. And he says, "Sure ... no problem."

Mark: Did you have to displace somebody else?

Thomas: No, no, it just ... no, they just added me onto the mechanic list in the shop that they had there They

Mark: What did you do? What was your job?

Thomas: I was a machinist. That's where I got a lotta my mechanical background there, just doin' just about everything. Machine work. Everything to do with mining equipment ...maintaining it.

Mark: Were you a lathe operator?

Thomas: Yeah, that's where I learned how to do that ... lathe, drill press, milling machine...

Mark: How long were you there at that job?

Thomas: Uh ...[he asks Isabel] how long was I there after that?

Isabel: I think you were there about ...

Thomas: '54 was when I ...

Isabel: Joe started the first grade here. We were there about seven years.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Why did you quit?

Thomas: Well, the mines ...

Isabel: ...closed.

Thomas: ...closed up and the ...Superior was, uh ... the coal mines for the Union Pacific Railroad. In fact, I could tell ya a pretty good story about that. The first streamliner – diesel streamliner – that went from coast to coast, we ... the people in Superior heard that this streamliner was gonna go by Point of Rocks which was about eight miles south of Superior. And they heard about this streamliner comin' through so practically the whole town went down there to see this train comin' through. And little did they realize that that was the beginning and the end of the town.

Mark: Interesting.

Thomas: ... Because it was a diesel engine on there and the engineer blew his horn there and slowed it down. And, boy, the people was just thrilled to death to see that, but that was beginning of the end of Superior. They didn't know it, they didn't realize it.

Mark: Really?

Thomas: No.

Mark: You don't think so?

Thomas: No, they didn't know that. Heck, no. It was a matter of, probably, ten years after that, that the town was closed, the mines were closed. People had to leave.

Mark: Well, and is that why you left is because the mines actually closed?

Thomas: Yeah, yeah. What was my last paycheck? Somethin' like ...

Isabel: Two dollars..

Thomas: One or two ... [his microphone falls from his shirt]

Mark: Yeah, we have to put that back on. Yeah, just squeeze it and put as much shirt in it You got it.

Thomas: OK.

Mark: OK. So, anyway, your last paycheck was what?

Isabel: Two dollars.

Thomas: It wasn't very much.

Isabel: Two dollars [laughs].

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Why two dollars?

Isabel: That's all that was ...by the time ... they took the rent out, and the ...

Thomas: Taxes and ...

Isabel: ... everything, all the deductions. We were left two dollars.

Thomas: So I decided that was time to get out. And so I come to Cheyenne lookin' for any kind of a job. And I went down to the Cheyenne Light, Fuel and Power and this guy told me, "Why don't you go out to DePaul Hospital?", he says, "They need somebody out there for maintaining the hospital. And so I went out there, and we went down to Denver and talked to the people down there, and then we find out that the guy that was supposedly gonna retire from DePaul changed his mind and he decided to stay, so I coulda had that job if he woulda retired like he said he was gonna do but ... And, then, I went back to the power company and he says, "Well, go down to the shop down there. Go down to the power plant and, he says, "I think they might need somebody down there." So I went in there and they hired me. And I took the job and that was the end of my coal mining experience.

Mark: What was your job?

Thomas: The same. I was a machinist. They had a little lathe down there that they wanted somebody to be able to operate that thing and a few other things.

Mark: Now, we talked about this yesterday but that's ... the building you're talking about where you worked is that tall, brick building just north of where *Wyoming Tribune-Eagle* is right now.

Thomas: Yeah. Yeah.

Mark: And it's got some metal pieces on top. The old Gem Coal Company coal chute was just east of that.

Thomas: Yeah. Yeah.

Mark: And you remember that, of course.

Thomas: Oh, yes.

Mark: Was that a good place to work?

Thomas: Well, it was fine during the times. I didn't even think much of it, but after a few years of it because-- mainly because management was very, very poor....

Mark: In what way? I don't understand.

Thomas: Well, if you were in the clique, if you were in the group, you were fine. But if you weren't in that group, why, they treated, they didn't treat ... they weren't fair with their promotion practices and stuff like that. I've been told by some of the employees down there that my problem was that I knew more about machine work, and the mechanics and repair work than the upper echelon of the plant, the management knew about it. I had quite a bit of experience. Hell, those guys didn't have any experience in that.

Mark: Who was ...this kind of problem, it seems to me, always goes up to the top levels of management.

Thomas: Sure. Sure, it did.

Mark: That's the ... those are the people that set the trends or the policies.

Thomas: Yeah, yeah. Well, they had a mech ...they had a plant superintendent. And then right under him was a mechanical maintenance superintendent. And the maintenance superintendent, from day one I don't think he cared for me. He was a ...[laughs] ... he was a navy guy and I think when he heard about me being an officer in the Air Force that did it for him, for me. That's just my thinking, I don't know for sure. But all the guys that worked down there were navy veterans.

Mark: Oh, were they?

Thomas: They had experience with steam. Drivin' these ships, and a lot of 'em had jobs that pertained to that. Uh, maybe I'm barkin' up the wrong tree but I really believe that was the case.

Mark: Well, if you felt it there was something there, wasn't there?

Thomas: Yeah, well, first chance I got to get outta there I got out. Well, I had to get out there, too, because they closed that plant down. [laughs]

Mark: Because they quit burning coal there?

Thomas: Yeah, well, they just ... they burned coal but the plant was old and it wasn't worth the time and expense to have all those people down there maintaining it. And it was a real old plant and it was just fallin' apart. Didn't put much power out there. They had 'bout five, I think, five turbine generators in there, just small things that just generated one or two, three megawatts of power, not very much. Then, I guess they just decided to go to gas. And, they were Colorado Public Service. They were the ...belonged to the Colorado Public

Service. And the Colorado Public Service were building a coupla big plants down in Colorado, and so this one here they didn't need, really. They shut it down.

Mark: What year was that?

Thomas: Oh, God, fifty

Isabel: We were here nine years. We came here in '54. We had nine years.

Mark: '63.

Isabel: About there, yeah.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Well, where did you go from there?

Thomas: Uh ...

Isabel: Westinghouse.

Thomas: They had Westinghouse service engineers come into the plants whenever they tore one of these units, one of these turbines, down. They sent in a Westinghouse service engineer here and I got to talkin' and I met these service engineers from Westinghouse. And they thought I was pretty good and they said ... when the plant closed down I asked them if there was a chance gettin' on with them and they hired me. So I went with them, same job, maintaining and inspecting turbine generators all over the country.

Mark: Oh, this wasn't in Cheyenne. You started traveling.

Thomas: Oh, did I ever travel. Twenty-six years of it. Yeah, it was rough.

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: It was really rough.

Mark: Where did you go? What sort of places did you go? Just everywhere?

Thomas: Well ... what do ya call it? – the office for this region here was in Denver. And no work around here. The big power plants, there just wasn't any around here. And the closest ones were in Denver and that wasn't all that much of a plant.

Mark: Public Service Company of Colorado

Thomas: Yeah, yeah. And ... so I worked there for ...

Isabel: You worked out of Kansas City, remember? Your origi ... your office was down in Kansas City.

Thomas: Well, they changed it, yeah. They took the office away from then and it switched to Kansas City.

Mark: Hmm. But, well, you also went to ... oh, boy, I've got here, uh You were, your job was called "Field Service Engineer".

Thomas: Um-hmm.

Mark: But you ... and you overhauled these turbines.

Thomas: Inspected 'em, they called it, yeah.

Mark: Oh, you inspected it ... you didn't do any work on em?

Thomas: Well, yeah, we did work on it but I was there just to see that the people that were workin' on it did the things according to the Westinghouse way or .. yeah, I had

Mark: Because these were Westinghouse turbines.

Thomas: Yeah, the Yeah.

Mark: Yeah. Was it any different from what you'd already worked on?

Thomas: Oh, yes, they were much bigger and a lot more modern, lot more complicated than these things down here. These were ... these were clunkers down here, real clunkers.

Mark: [chuckles] Well, you worked in Missouri, Kansas ...

Thomas: Oh, God, I worked all over the United States.

Mark: Yeah, and for more than one power company, too, Utah Power and Light?

Thomas: Oh, yeah, different power companies, yeah ...wherever.

Isabel: Wherever they had a turbine ...

Thomas: Yeah.

Isabel: ... he went, wherever the companies. He went to Kansas, Missouri, Texas ...

Thomas: Oh, I was all over, yeah.

Isabel: ...New Jersey, Maine, Pennsylvania.

Thomas: [laughs]

Isabel: He's been ... I think there's about four or five states he hasn't been in, working.

Mark: Well, did you ... you didn't work for those power companies, you worked for Westinghouse.

Thomas: Um-hm. Westinghouse charged them big bucks for my services.

Mark: Really, like what's "big bucks"?

Thomas: Oh, I'd say, over a hundred dollars an hour.

Mark: When was this? In the '60s?

Thomas: Um-hm.

Mark: You were makin' over a hundred bucks an hour?

Thomas: Nah, I wasn't makin' it. Westinghouse was makin' it, see?

Isabel: [laughs]

Thomas: They paid me a salary and they charged the company ... time and expense.

Mark: Yeah. Well, how technical was that? Did you have to know math or was it a practical job?

Thomas: No, you had to know pneumatics, hydraulics, electrical, mechanical... uh, God, just about anything to with overhauling a turbine generator.

Mark: Physics, you had to know physics.

Thomas: Mostly mechanical, mostly mechanical. And there was a generator on the end there that you hadda know somethin' about. You had to know a little about electrical.

Mark: Did you ever get stumped by a problem?

Thomas: Oh, sure, yeah. I used to lose a lotta sleep over that. I'd be in a motel and I'd have a problem and I'd wake up in the middle of the night, and pull out the instruction books and drawing and ... see if I couldn't solve that problem. Yeah, I did a lot of that. I did a lotta problem-solving in the middle of the night. [laughs]

Mark: Do you remember Zanetti? ... Zanetti Bus Lines.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: And do you remember – what was his first name? Zanetti?

Isabel: Pete

Thomas: Pete. It was “Pete” Zanetti, yeah.

Mark: Pete. Pete Zanetti. I interviewed him one time. This was about twenty years ago. And he told me a story about a mechanic of his who had to go up to ... it was either Riverton or Lander, and repair a bus that had broken down. And the repairman couldn't figure out the problem and called up Zanetti and said, “What do I do? And he said, “Well, you just ...” He says, “I want you to think about it, just think about it ... go to bed, get some sleep. In the morning when you wake up you'll have a solution. And he says it worked. The guy woke up in the morning, he was able to make the repair

Thomas: Oh, yeah. Oh, I used to think to think about it all night when I had a problem. I couldn't sleep. So I'd get up and I had all my books and all my drawings and everything with me [laughs] and if I couldn't figure it out I'd call up the manager in Kansas City or in Denver and talk to them. And we usually come up with a ...

Mark: ... With a solution.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Yeah. What was the toughest problem you ever had?

Thomas: Oh, God, I had a lot of 'em. What was that one down at New Mexico? A little job down there I don't even remember where it was. It was down in New Mexico ... some little gas pumping station there. They had a turbine generator there, a little, small one and we couldn't get it ... Oh, then there was another one. On a ship out of ...

Isabel: Bayonne, New Jersey.

Thomas: No, this one was down in Houston, in the Gulf of Mexico.

Isabel: Oh.

Thomas: There was a problem on a ship there. They got a little turbine generator there to, not to drive the ship, but to have power for lights and everything else on the ship. And ... I went in there and I was just lucky. I found out what was wrong right away.

Mark: What was it?

Thomas: And I remember the guys that were workin' there. They were hopin' that I was fail ... that I would fail because they were goin' to shore, you know, and they were havin' a good time.

Mark: [laughs]

Thomas: And I fixed that thing right away. And, uh ... oh, there was several problems like that. One of 'em was in Joliet, Illinois, a great, big steam turbine, big son-of-a-gun. Great big one. And they ... somethin' wrong with the controls. And I was lucky that time, too. I walked in there and I says, "Well, we gotta go into this control valve here." And they took the cover off it and I reached in there and pushed on a spring a little bit and everything started workin' fine. And that was the extent of that. I got that one fixed and that was a multi-million dollar machine there. Well, put a feather in my cap.

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: Oh, just about everywhere you went you run into problems.

Mark: Now, you ... according to what I read somewhere you put in a lot more time than just what you were supposed to put in.

Thomas: Oh, sure, yes. Like I say, I did a lotta work at night ... on my own.

Isabel: Well, when he worked at Westinghouse they had a maximum of what he could earn in a month. And after he worked that maximum he worked for nothing.

Mark: Really?

Isabel: Yes, and he had, was on a

Thomas: Well, I had my regular pay but I didn't get paid overtime.

Isabel: Yeah ... make no overtime. He worked about three weeks graveyard, twelve-hours day, but....

Thomas: Well, I was in Moberly, Missouri workin' with Westinghouse. And I was on the night shift. I was workin' twelve hours a night. I worked through Christmas, New Year's, without a day off. I was sleepin' ... we had the job finished, we were winding it up. And I was asleep in the day and my boss in Kansas City called me up in the middle of the morning and I was sleepin'. And he said, "I hope you're aware that you're scheduled to go south of St. Louis to work on a Unidym[?]. And, boy, that just burned me up. I says, "Well, I hope you're aware that I'm gonna go home and I'm gonna stay home for two weeks, and I don't want anybody to bother me.

[Mark and Thomas both laugh].

Thomas: And about that time the news came out that General Electric was, uh ... gonna furnish the turbine generators for the Jim Bridger Plant in Rock Springs. And I says, "By God, when I go home this time I'm gonna go and see General Electric and see if I can't get on with them because they had a lotta work around here, General Electric did. And so that's what I did. I come home and I went, rode down to Denver and I went to see the guy there, and the manager of General Electric down there and he hired me on the spot. So I called up Westinghouse in Kansas City and told 'em I was givin' 'em two weeks notice.

Mark: What did they say?

Thomas: [laughs] They tried to hire me ... oh, they offered me more money, they offered me a car and everything like that and I just ... they were just running me to death. They were running me all over the country and ...

Isabel: He was home one day in one year ... one day ...

Thomas: And, and ...

Isabel: ...in a whole year, once.

Thomas: And G.E. had a uh, lotta machines in Denver and south around Pueblo and they were buildin' one out towards Brush and Fort Morgan out there. And then they put in four units over at Jim Bridger –I was at Jim Bridger for three and a half years – and at Craig they had units there, G.E., and then this plant up here in Wheatland. I got that job right off the bat.

Mark: Laramie Basin?

Thomas: Um-hm. I installed those three units up there.

Mark: Oh, you did?

Thomas: Yup.

Mark: When was that? What year was that? Do you remember?

Isabel: That was ... that was just before ... you retired.

Thomas: '70s? Wasn't it in the '70s? Joe was ...

Isabel: Joe had gotten out of the navy.

Thomas: Yeah, and he's been with them for 25 years, isn't it?

Isabel: You got him a job up there.

Thomas: So it's 25 years ago.

Isabel: Um-hmm.

Mark: So '84 '84 is when Joe got his job in there ...at the power plant.

Thomas: Yeah, I got him his job.

Mark: Oh, you did?

Thomas: Yeah. ... I went ...

Isabel: He was workin' for the railroad, Joe was, and livin' in Cheyenne after he got out of the navy, and worked for Burlington for a few months. And then Tommy got him the job up there.

Thomas: Well, I just, I recommended him. I went in and asked the supervisor there for Basin Electric, I asked him if he could use a guy with Joe's knowledge. He learned a lot about computers in the Navy and they said, "Gee, yeah, we'd love to have a guy that has a lot of computer experience. So, they hired Joe.

Mark: Hmm. Did Joe go to college?

Isabel: Two years. And then he went to the Navy for ten.

Mark: So what was his experience? Just computers or ...

Isabel: On the ship, whatever he did on the ship.

Thomas: Mainly computers.

Mark: But he didn't have any mechanical background like yours.

Isabel: Oh, it wasn't mechanical.

Thomas: No, he ... he was in the -what'd ya call it?

Isabel: Control.

Thomas: Yeah, running the plant ... running the units, running the turbine generators.

Mark: Was he good at that?

Isabel: Yeah.

Thomas: Oh, he's good at computers. He's sharp, really sharp.

Mark: That's right, that's what Linda told me.

Thomas: Yeah, he's good at it.

Mark: Yeah. Now what is Brent good at? What does he do?

Thomas: What does he do? [laughs] That's a good question [laughs]

Isabel: He does a little of everything. He went to school two years and then he went to the infantry in Vietnam. That's where I got all my gray hair.

Mark: Oooh, yeah. In the army?

Isabel: Yeah. Infantry, yeah, Army infantry.

Thomas: He was goin' ... he got drafted.

Isabel: Yeah.

Thomas: He dropped out of school and, boy, right away Selective Service got him.

Mark: He's lucky to be alive.

Isabel: Yes, he is.

Thomas: He got a purple heart while he was over there.

Mark: Oh, he got hit.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: You mean shot at, or just shrapnel or what?

Thomas: Well, he finally told us about it. We didn't know about it until just ...

Isabel: He didn't talk about it.

Thomas: ... just recently. I ...we didn't know that he got a Purple Heart.

Isabel: No.

Thomas: And, finally, one day at the table here, at the dinner table I says, "How come you never told us about you getting' a Purple Heart? "Well, I just didn't think it was that big a deal", he said. Then he told us about what happened. He didn't get wounded. He got ...

Isabel: ...knocked out.

Thomas: He got a concussion ...concussion from a shell that landed real close to where these guys were. He said that they were, they had a crane, they were movin' a crane down the road and, uh, he said they finally got it to where they were ... had it secured. And so they, all the guys got in their foxholes or whatever and were takin' a nap. And he said he was asleep when this happened. A shell landed real close to him and I guess they put him in the hospital for a couple, two, three days. He got a severe concussion.

Mark: But he's OK. I mean, there weren't any ...

Thomas: Oh, yeah, ...

Mark: ... there weren't any ...

Thomas: ... but for a long time there Brent was, uh ... boy, he'd go to the football game and they'd fire that cannon over there and he'd just shudder ... and he knew it was comin'. So he saw a lotta action over there. Yeah, he ...

Mark: Why did he go in the Army and Joe in the Navy?

Isabel: Well, he joined the Marines, Brent did. And went to Denver. And that didn't ... for some reason it didn't work out.

Thomas: Yeah.

Isabel: So he came home and was ...

Thomas: And was just drafted.

Isabel: ... he was drafted into the Infantry, the Army. And Joe, when Brent came home, he came home two weeks before the TET Offensive. And just before Christmas, he came home two weeks before Christmas.

Thomas: His whole outfit over there was wiped out in the TET Offensive.

Isabel: And Joe was ... called ... and I [laughs] I just about had a fit. So he joined the Navy. He says, "I'm not goin' to the Army." He joined the Navy.

Mark: He did that because he was worried about himself, or you, or both of you?

Isabel: Well, he just didn't ... I guess he didn't wanta go in the Infantry or Army.

Mark: Who would? Yeah, who would? [whooshes]

Thomas: We had some tough times with him ... I'll never forget ... Brent ... I was on a job down in Arkansas and he was down in Fort ... uh ...

Isabel: Ft. Polk.

Thomas: Ft. Polk, Louisiana. And he was gettin' a leave prior to goin' overseas at that time, and so he come up to Arkansas where I was workin' and my job was windin' up there and we drove home together. And he was home a coupla weeks, I guess, and then it was time for him to get on a plane and head for San Francisco or wherever it was, to go overseas. And, God, I remember we were rushin' so he ... make sure he wouldn't miss that plane. And we got him up at the airport and I thought, "What in the hell am I doin'?" Here I'm puttin' my son on an airplane to go to Vietnam. And, I says, "I'm afraid he's gonna miss the plane." I says, "What the hell am I doin'?" And, God, I felt so bad when I saw that plane take off.

Mark: Hmm. Yeah, I can imagine.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Yeah. But he made it OK.

Thomas: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: He don't have any use for the ... the upper echelon of the government. He don't like the politicians or anything. He's never forgiven 'em for what happened in Vietnam.

Mark: Really.

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Where ... Yeah, I'll be he has some stories to tell. I wasn't in the service. For some reason I escaped all that, but I still carry guilt feelings that I shoulda been there ...especially when all the guys came home and they took so much static. You know ... that was a tough one.

Isabel: Oh, terrible.

Thomas: Brent just talked a little bit about it. He told me a coupla stories that were really scary. He says, "One time they were ... they had a firefight with the Vietcong. And bullets were flyin' all over, and he says that ... he said that a rifle grenade landed right close to him. And he says he hit the ground and rolled over, and he says when he rolled over there was another rifle grenade layin' right there. But it happened to be a ...

Mark: A dud?

Thomas: A dud. One in ten was duds. And he said, either one of 'em coulda blown him to hell. He says ... he says, "That's when I knew somebody up there was takin' care of, watchin' over me [laughs].

Mark: He had the same feeling you did when you were flyin'.

Thomas: Oh, God, I don't know. He saw a lot more action than I did. He deserved all the ... praises that he

Isabel: Yeah.

Mark: Joe wasn't in action then?

Thomas: Well, he was in ... he was in the Navy off the coast. They were ... was he in?

Isabel: He was over in the Mediterranean when they had the Six Day War, remember?

Thomas: Yeah.

Isabel: ...Israel and Egypt.

Mark: Um-hmm ... '67.

Thomas: And that's where his wife left him, when he was in the Navy, he was [laughs] ...his first wife left him when he was overseas in the Navy.

Isabel: And then he was in the North Sea.

Thomas: She picked up with some other guy, some draft dodger down there in Virginia.

Mark: Hmm. Well ...

Thomas: That was tough, too.

Mark: [talking to Isabel] Well, it's a wonder you didn't leave him, after him being only home one day ... out of a day.

Isabel: No, I stayed home takin' care of the kids. It was tough, but

Mark: Was it tough, Tom?

Thomas: Oh, God, yeah. I wouldn't ever do it again. I would never do it again. I missed out on too much. I missed out on my sons growin' up. Twenty-six years.

Mark: Yeah, yeah.

Thomas: I didn't even get to see 'em graduate from high school.

Isabel: Oh, you were home for graduation.

Thomas: I was home for Brent's but not Joe's.

Isabel: Yeah, one of 'em he wasn't ...

Thomas: Brent was over ... Central ...and McGee gave the address. Senator McGee gave the address, graduation address.

Mark: Senator Gale McGee.

Thomas: And I went to that one. But I missed out on so many things. I missed out on their sports, there, that they were involved in. They both were involved in basketball and football, high school. I think I saw one game that Brent played in

Isabel: One.

Thomas: ... against the

Isabel: Got home that night. One.

Thomas: Yeah.

Isabel: That's when he hurt his shoulder.

Mark: Well, they don't hold this against you, do they?

Thomas: Oh, no, I don't think so.

Isabel: I don't know. We never asked.

Mark: [laughs] You never asked, huh?

Thomas: I gave them a pretty good living, anyway.

Mark: You know, they're gonna listen to this sometime down the road, probably ...when we're all pushin' up daisies ... but I'm wondering what stories you have to tell about those two boys. Do you have any good stories? Or, maybe I should ask Isabel that. We can do that in our interview, but do you remember any?

Thomas: Oh, sure [clears his throat] I ...one good thing that I did for them, I think, 'cause ... uh, teachin' 'em about the great outdoors. And we started when we were in Superior goin' out and lookin' for Indian artifacts – arrowheads, and such, around Superior. And they were just little, bitty kids when I started 'em in that. I always did that when ... I can remember I

got some nice points down there that I was so proud of. And I got them started on that and, boy, they love it to this day. They like to go out and look for arrowheads. And, you know, to respect the land and enjoy the great outdoors the way I do. I really enjoy goin' out and ... with them. And then I enjoyed watchin' them play baseball and football and, uh

Mark: Do you remember having to bait their hooks in fishing?

Thomas: Oh, yes, I taught 'em how to fish, too. When we were in Superior the coal miners got ten day vacation. And we used to all go up to Hoback Canyon Up there by Jackson. I don't know whether you know where Hoback Canyon is.

Mark: Yeah.

Thomas: And the whole town'd practically move up there. And ... did fish the Hoback and the Snake River there.

Mark: Oh, I thought this was just family reunions. You're talkin' about all of Superior?

Thomas: Oh, no, this was a vacation. They give ya ten days without pay. And then, finally, later on they give ya' ten days and they paid ya' ten dollars a day, somethin' like that I think it was, for vacation. And, uh

Isabel: We'd go every year. Camp out on the Hoback. And they'd fish and we'd go to Jackson and have a .. oh, they had a place where they these cookouts, where they had big pots ... and kids liked that.

Thomas: Cowboy dinner.

Mark: Oh, yeah. Big cauldron or ...

Isabel: and they'd have the ...

Mark: Milk cans or somethin'?

Isabel: ... they'd have the beans and the baked, uh ... what? Whatever. It was a restaurant. They liked that. And we'd go up, see the falls ... and the geysers and through the Park [Yellowstone].

Mark: Why did you guys go up the Hoback?

Thomas: It's just a thing that everybody in Superior did for ten days.

Mark: Well, yeah, but they coulda' gone to Dubois. They coulda gone up to the Black Hills. Was there somethin' to do with Ston's, er Stanley's CCC work or something like that up there?

Thomas: He did work on the CC's up there.

Isabel: No ...

Thomas: Cliff Creek.

Isabel: That was when he was young. No. All the camp ... it seemed like Superior, they all went up there and the kids played together. And we had a tent and just cooked out and ...

Thomas: Oh, it was a great time. We had a lotta fun up there. The women were watchin' the kids, make sure they didn't fall in the water...

Isabel: ... over the river. [laughs]

Thomas: ... and drown. And the men were out catchin' fish. And then in the evening they'd fry up all these fish and then they were ...

Isabel: ... and we'd all eat together.

Thomas: ... and they were just, really, good eating, you know. Cooked 'em right out there.

Mark: Cutthroats?

Thomas: Yeah. That's what are in the Hoback.

Mark: Yeah. Do you still enjoy fishing today?

Thomas: Oh, I haven't fished for a long time. I give all of my tackle and everything away to my grandsons.

Mark: Why don't you fish anymore?

Thomas: Uh, I took up golf [laughs] When I took up golf fishing just went out the door ... along with hunting.

Mark: [laughs] Well, did you take your boys hunting, too?

Thomas: No. No, I never had them hunting.

Isabel: They were [undecipherable]

Thomas: I didn't do all that much hunting, either. I went huntin', maybe, two or three times for elk. I never did go hunting for deer or antelope, just elk.

Mark: Didja ever shoot one?

Thomas: Oh, yeah. Yeah. And then, uh, she didn't like the wild game. She didn't like cookin' it or eating it or anything else so ... I just give it up and ...

Mark: Did ... were you a pretty good shot?

Thomas: Oh, yeah. I built my own rifle out of an old ... old World War I Enfield rifle that had the ... the 30.06 rifle. I sporterized it. I did a nice job. In fact, one guy saw it layin' on the back seat when I was out huntin' and he says, "Oh, you got an Enfield", er ...what'd ya call that?

Mark: A 309?

Thomas: Uhh ...

Isabel: Winchester?

Thomas: Weatherby. "Oh," he says, "looks like you got a Weatherby.

Mark: A Weatherby.

Thomas: "Yeah", I says, "yeah, that's a Weatherby, alright. [laughs] Oh, I put a new stock on it and did some machine work on it, and jeweled the bolt on it. And it was a nice-lookin' gun, I'll have to show it to ya.

Mark: Yeah. Yeah. I had an old World War I rifle when I first went hunting. I think they called it a .309? [he means .303 British].

Thomas: Well, there was a Springfield and an Enfield. The Enfield was used in World War I more than, uh ... Springfield come later. Springfield was in ...towards the latter stages of World War I.

Mark: OK, OK.

Thomas: Enfield was the old one.

Mark: Umm ... what kind of boys were your two boys growin' up?

Thomas: Oh, I thought they were ...

Isabel: They were pretty nice.

Thomas: ... were real good. They didn't give us any trouble.

Mark: They didn't ... they weren't troublemakers like you were?

Thomas: No. [laughs] No, they weren't. Well, Brent got into a few problems. But Joe, I don't think Joe ever did. They would go out and party a little bit but they weren't drunkards.

Isabel: No.

Thomas: We never did have to bail ...

Isabel: Only time ... when Brent finished his summer job. He worked for the State one time, in the summer and they celebrated the last day. And he came home, he was a little looped.

Mark: [laughs]

Thomas: And he was on the floor in the kitchen. I didn't feel sorry for him. I stepped over him. I said, "That's what you get." That's the only time I saw him that ... you know, a young babe givin' him a few beers, I guess and he just couldn't take it and ...

Mark: Yeah. I hate to tell ya the story of when I got clobbered one time but that's neither here nor there. Well, now, let's see. You worked for Westinghouse how long, Tom?

Isabel: About nine ... eight or nine ... eight years, I think.

Thomas: Nine years, I think.

Mark: So that would've been from what to what? We left off at Cheyenne Light, Fuel and Power in '63. And you worked there for Westinghouse for nine?

Thomas: Nine years, yeah.

Mark: Seventy-two ... so you were only fifty years old.

Thomas: Yeah, somewhere in there.

Mark: So you retired early?

Isabel: No, he went to work for General Electric ...

Mark: Oh, G.E., that's right ...

Thomas: That's when I went to work for General Electric.

Mark: ...and then how long did you work for G.E.?

Isabel: Fourteen years.

Thomas: Fourteen years.

Mark: 'Till you were sixty-six.

Isabel: Sixty-two he retired.

Thomas: Yeah.

Isabel: He retired at 62 so he must have been, whatever, maybe we missed a couple of years.

Mark: Yeah, we missed ... our addition ...

Thomas: Aw, I got screwed up on the years there a little bit.

Mark: Yeah. Well, but you really didn't wanta quit, didja? ... Because your resume said you were willing to work.

Thomas: Well, I went to work on my own after I retired from G.E. ... I, uh, what'd' ya call it?

Isabel: Independent contractor.

Thomas: Independent contractor, yeah. I did that, and I did maybe one or two jobs a year after that for several years.

Mark: Did you enjoy that a little bit more?

Thomas: Oh, sure, that was nice. I was getting' big bucks [laughs] and I knew that when the job was over I was gonna go home and stay home for the rest of the year. And so it was really...

Mark: Were you the kind of ... I'm kinda curious, were you the kind of people who, when you got money, would spend it like, well, like my mother used to say, "Like a drunken sailor?"

Isabel: Yeah, I would, too.

Mark: But, but ... or did you tuck it away? Or did you ...

Isabel: I tucked it away.

Thomas: Isabel took care of all the finances.

Mark: Yeah, yeah.

Thomas: That's why we're in the shape that we're in today.

Isabel: That's why we have a bathroom now [laughs].

Thomas: And that's why we got a bathroom that's worth \$22,000 dollars.

[all three laugh]

Mark: Well, isn't it a shock to have to pay that when you think back about what ...

Thomas: Oh, it don't bother me at all.

Mark: Doesn't it?

Thomas: No, no. She did a ver ... excellent job of taking care of our finances.

Mark: Yeah. Have you been materialistic people, do you think?

Isabel: Well, I like good things, we both like good things, but when we get 'em we take care of 'em. They last us forever.

Mark: Yeah ... yeah. Well that's your upbringing.

Isabel: Yeah.

Mark: That's your background for you.

Isabel: That's right.

Mark: Uh, OK, uh, do you also ... I wanted to mention this. You also won some awards while you were working. Do you remember those awards that you received?

Thomas: Yeah, most of 'em are ...

Isabel: You've got the plaques down there.

Thomas: I got ... out in the garage I got several things ... hangin' up there.

Mark: What sort of awards were they?

Thomas: Oh, management awards for some of the things that I did, you know. G.E. was really good. I enjoyed working for G.E. They were so much better than Westinghouse. I was workin' close to home, and the management down in Denver really ...really liked me. I just loved those guys down in Denver. They were great ...great people.

Mark: Didja ever ... 'scuse me?

Isabel: His boss, Co-gill [she pronounces it this way} was in the service.

Thomas: Yeah, he got the ...

Isabel: He and Tommy were pretty close.

Thomas: Yeah, he got the ... he was in a ... tank commander in Europe and he was injured really bad ... and he got the Silver Star.

Mark: What was his name? "Co-gill"?

Thomas: Yeah, Thurston Co-gill ... Cowgill, lotta people called him: C-O-W-G-I-L-L.

Mark: OK.

Thomas: He was the manager down there and he's the one that hired me. He hired me right on the spot when I went down there and ... I think I was his pet [laughs], I really do.

Mark: [laughs]

Thomas: When he heard that I was a pilot in World War II ... and every time he'd see me, "Well, how's the B-29 pilot doin' these days?" Yeah, and he treated me good. He really treated me good. He ... we ... a job come up in Hawaii and I was the one that got it. He picked me to go do it ...in the middle of winter.

Mark: Did you go with him? [he asks Isabel]

Isabel: Twice. Oh, yes.

Thomas: Sure.

Isabel: I didn't miss both.

Mark: Well, did you have reunions with any of your colleagues in the service? You know, your fellow pilots?

Thomas: No, I kept in touch with 'em but we never did get together. Coupla' of 'em visited me here in Cheyenne. The last one was [sounds like "Mar-hefga"]. He stopped in here ... oh, and Hoffman come, stopped to see ...

Isabel: Hoffman, his uh... engineer.

Thomas: As far as I know I think they're all gone. I think they're all dead now.

Mark: We ... this wasn't on tape but you said you remembered the names of these guys ... now, can we go through those?

Isabel: Those two I remember, Bennett and [has tough time pronouncing "Rehaszek {?}"].

Mark: "Rehaw ...?"

Isabel: He mentioned the others yesterday, didn't you? And the, uh ... O'Neill.

Thomas: Neal, not O'Neill.

Isabel: O'Neill. Those three he didn't mention yesterday.

Mark: And who were they? What were their positions?

Thomas: [laughs] I can give ya that. I don't think she can give ya positions. Uh ... me, I was the aircraft commander, Bernier from Whitefish, Montana was my co-pilot.

Mark: "Ma-near" or "Ba-near"?

Thomas: Bernier: B-E-R-N-I-E-R ... Bernier. And he wasn't all that great, to tell ya the truth. I didn't care much for my co-pilot. He didn't wanta go overseas. He tried to get out of goin' overseas and that kinda irritated me. I made up my mind, I says, "By God, you're gonna go over there with me if it kills me. But he could fly. He was a pretty good pilot. And then there was Joe Atridge, he was the bombardier. He sat right in front of us.

Mark: How do you spell that?

Thomas: A-T-T-R-I-D-G-E. And he was our best man at our wedding. He was the guy that sprinkled holy water all over us before takeoff. And I ... first time he did that I said, "God-darn, we must have left the window open or somethin'. And there he was with his holy water, sprinkling me with holy water. [laughs] And then behind me was, uh ... oh [laughs] ...

Isabel: Hoffman?

Thomas: No, Hoffman was the flight engineer. You mentioned my, uh ...

Isabel: Atridge?

Thomas: ...my navigator. You're the one that remembered him [laughs] ... Rehaczek ... Rehaczek [?].

Mark: Yeah, I was gonna say, "Don't wake up in the middle of the night on this."

Thomas: Rehaczek was the navigator.

Mark: Can you spell that? That's a tough one.

Thomas: R-I-C-H-C-E-K, I think, "Ree-ha-check"

Mark: Ree-ha-check”.

Thomas: Yeah, he was a Polack or somethin’ from Toledo, Ohio. And then there was the radio operator ... uh, Preston ... Bob Preston. That was the extent of us in the front. Then in the back was Mar-heff-ka [sp] was the left scanner. What was that ...?

Mark: The left. Now would that be pilot’s side or is that co-pilot’s side?

Thomas: Pilot’s side. Pilot’s side. Right was ...uh, what was the name of the one that was down in Texas? Chico, Ciero ... Ciero. It was the Italian boy ... guy ... he was the right scanner. And Neill was the Central Fire Control. And then we had a radar operator, Hammersmith. His name was Hammersmith. And then there was, uh, Bennett was tailgunner.

Mark: OK.

Thomas: He was the one that called up and say, “We got a hole in this tail as big as my ... that I could jump through,” he said. [laughs]

Mark: Well, now, the left and the right scanners, were they on the belly of the plane? Or were they on the side?

Thomas: On the side.

Mark: Right on the side.

Thomas: The B-29 had a remote control gunnery system. You had a sight here and the gun was over there. You’d turn your sight here and the gun’d go that way. Pretty modernistic, really. That was the only plane that had that. And that was because ... G.E. was the ones that invented that thing and installed those things in the B-29s. It was real nice because you didn’t have to have any open windows like they did in B-24s and B-17s. They just had open windows and they controlled the guns themselves, up here, 25,000 feet got pretty cold. Thirty, forty, fifty below zero, you know, and here they are fightin’ off those Germans planes with plain ‘ol fifty-caliber machine guns. Whereas, the B-29 was pressurized and just had regular clothes, and they weren’t anywhere near the guns that they were firing. They’d just have the sight. They’d move that sight like that and the gun would go wherever they aimed it, with this remote control sight.

Mark: When you were ... when you were flyin’ a B-29 were the Germans and Japanese, were they afraid of those B-29s because of all the guns or

Thomas: Oh, hell no, they shot a lotta B-29s down. They lost a lotta B-29s over there.

Mark: But it seems like you had more firepower than they did.

Thomas: Oh, we did have more firepower than the B-17s. But, they can't compete against a bunch of fighters. No airplane can. It's just that ... fighters are too fast and too maneuverable.

Mark: Did you ever get attacked by Japanese fighters?

Thomas: Not one, no. We seen a couple of 'em one time but evidently they were ... they didn't want have any part of us. [laughs]

Mark: Did you wear that classic leather jacket? With fur collar or whatever it was?

Thomas: No, I just had a plain, leather jacket, but we didn't wear those on our regular missions. We just wore regular flight suits, coveralls.

Mark: 'Cause it was pressurized.

Thomas: Yeah. It was warm ... up around 30,000 feet it was 70 degrees in the plane. It was nice.

Mark: If you could go back, Tom, would you like to fly a B-29 again?

Thomas: Oh, yeah, I'd like to try it?

Mark: Do you think you could?

Thomas: I was pretty good at it, I know that. [laughs]

Mark: Now, if you got into that cockpit you think you'd do OK?

Thomas: Oh, no, I couldn't do it. I'd have to go to training. All of ... at this age now I couldn't do it. I'm sure I couldn't do it.

Mark: I don't know. I interviewed a pilot by the name of Clyde Ice in Spearfish, South Dakota. There's an airport called "Clyde Ice Field" ... named after him? Very early pilot. And his son flew a South Dakota governor around ... Yanklovich or Yankovich or something like that. And, uh, he ... Uh, I think he actually flew up until ... I think they let him take over the controls when he was a hundred years old.

Thomas: Oh? [laughs] Well, I wouldn't want him to be [laughs] ... be the captain while I was in that plane.

Mark: [laughs]

Thomas: I'd wanta be elsewhere. [laughs]

Mark: [laughs] Well, do you do much flying lately?

Thomas: No, I haven't flown since I got out. No.

Mark: Not at all?

Thomas: Hm-uhm. Not at all. Well, fly on commercial planes.

Mark: Right, right. Well, OK, uh, we've spent an hour here just talkin' about your job. Is there anything else you want to say about your life? Your job? Your military service?

Thomas: Well, it was a great experience. I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world.

Mark: World War II experience?

Thomas: Yeah.

Mark: Yeah.

Isabel: Oh, by the way, when they went on those missions and bombed all those cities in Japan they went up before and gave out leaflets, dropped leaflets tellin' the people to get out of those cities. So it wasn't that you were waitin' to kill all the people.

Thomas: Yeah, they did, too. Most of the people they'd get out.

Mark: Yeah, I remember reading about that.

Thomas: Uh, that Toyama raid that I said was the most perfect raid of the war, there was only 2,200 people killed there. A city of 200,000 population. Oh, I could tell ya a story about that, too. [laughs] I was workin' in, uh, Salt Lake at that copper mine over there?

Mark: Anaconda?

Thomas: I don't know whether it was Anaconda.

Mark: Oh, no, no, no. Bingham Canyon?

Thomas: Yeah, over there. They had a power plant there and I went in there and I met this guy, and he said he was a prisoner of war. And I says, "Where were you stationed in Japan when you were a prisoner of war?" He said, "Just outside of Toyama, right outside of Toyama, right on the edge of Toyama. I says, "Well, were you there when we firebombed that?" He says, "Was I?" He says, "We were right in the middle of it." He says, "We had a couple of those incendiary bombs land in our compound", he says, "but we just got a bucket of sand and poured sand on 'em out but," he says, "Boy, we were ..." He said, "We were there cheerin' and havin' a good time while you guys were burnin' that city down." I says, "Well, I got some pictures of that, you know? I got some strike photos of Toyama when we hit it, and he [he means "I"] says ... "If you wanta see 'em I'll send 'em to ya." He says, "Boy"

he says, "yeah, send it to me". He said, "I'd really like to see 'em." So I sent him a bunch of pictures there and he sent 'em back.

Mark: Did he tell you about his experience ... as a prisoner of war?

Thomas: Oh, yeah, he was really mad at the Ja ... he didn't have any use for Japanese. Yeah, he says, "When ..." He said it was horrible.

Mark: Did he tell you, too ... did he remember your dropping some supplies there, too?

Thomas: He ...oh, I didn't drop 'em on his camp.

Mark: Oh, you didn't?

Thomas: Further south where ... I guess they dropped supplies on his camp, though. I don't know for sure, but we tried to get all of 'em.

Mark: Wonder how many B-29 pilots are left?

Thomas: I don't know.

Mark: Wouldn't that be interesting to be able to talk to those ...?

Thomas: They're all getting' pretty ... pretty up in years.

Mark: It'd be fun to talk to those guys, wouldn't it?

Thomas: Yeah, it would.

Mark: Do they have reunions?

Thomas: Yeah, the 73rd Wing had a reunion here not too long ago down ... Oklahoma City, I guess. They ... who was it called me up? Oh, Marhefka's sister ...

Isabel: Daughter.

Thomas: ... daughter called me up and she says, "They're havin' a reunion, 73rd Wing in Oklahoma City," I think she said it was. And she said, "If you're interested you sure would be welcome to go to that.

Mark: And you didn't go?

Thomas: Aw, I couldn't do it.

Mark: Well, would you go if there was another one?

Thomas: Well, if it was oh, they ... I guess they had 'em every so often 'cause I read about one back East that they had for 73rd Wing. Seventy-Third Wing was a pretty prominent outfit. They were a good outfit. That was old General Rosie O'Donnell's outfit.

Mark: Yeah. What ... if I may ask, what are the things your remember best? What were the best experiences of your life?

Thomas: Uh, God. You mean as far as flying goes or ...?

Mark: Anything.

Thomas; Being able to woo her, win her. I think that's probably the best. Yeah, I couldn't a done better.

Mark: Family still important to you?

Thomas: Oh, sure, very important.

Mark: Well, I was gonna ask you about your political opinions buy maybe we'll let those go for another day.

Thomas: [laughs]

Mark: Are you a Republican, Tom?

Thomas: Yeah ... well, I'm conservative.

Mark: You're conservative.

Thomas: I'm a very conservative guy.

Isabel: We voted both ways. If we think the ...

Thomas: I, uh ...

Isabel: ... the guy's good we vote for him. We don't care what they are but .. but we're more conservative.

Mark: OK. Alright. Well, I want to tell ya how much I appreciate your talkin' to me.

Thomas: Well, I appreciate your comin' over here and listening to all this. It surprised me, the extent that we went to ... get this story.

Mark: Well, I hope you're not disappointed.

Thomas: There's probably a lot of things that I missed ... just like tellin' ya about this guy that was in the prisoner of war camp. See, stuff like that comes back.

Mark: Right, right.

Thomas: I think it's been enjoyable. And I think you did a real good job of gettin' a lot outta me.

Mark: Well, thanks. If there's something you want to talk about down the road where you'd like to sit down and talk about a few other things, I'm available.

Thomas: OK. I'll, uh ... if I think of ... there's a few things I know that I'll think about ... and I'll say, "Why didn't I say ... why didn't I tell him about this?" And, "Why didn't I tell him about that?"

Mark: Just call me up. I'm just across town.

Thomas: Yeah. I'm not more than ten minutes from here. In fact, I think it took me eight minutes to get here this morning ... even though I was a little late. OK, well, let's stop this and then, uh, do you wanta take a little break? [he asks Isabel?]

Isabel: Who, me?

Mark: Yeah, then ...

Isabel: No, I don't have to take a break. [static from Tom's removing his microphone]

Mark: OK. Well, we'll hook you up then. OK. This ... this is the end here.